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# PAINTED AND CARVED HOUSE EMBELLISHMENTS AT 'ORONGO VILLAGE, EASTER ISLAND

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## INTRODUCTION

The center for the Birdman ceremonies, 'Orongo, perches on the rim of Rano Kau, facing the islets of Motu Kao Kao, Motu Iti, and Motu Nui. 'Orongo village is composed of some fifty dry-laid stone buildings (referred to by the numbers according to Ferdon 1961: fig. 137), that were occupied seasonally during the annual Birdman competition (Routledge 1920:426, Métraux 1940:331-332). The cult developed after the gradual collapse of ancestor worship (Lee 1992:14), becoming the main ideological and social phenomenon during the late period of Rapa Nui history. The resulting complex iconography made 'Orongo "... one of the most interesting archaeological sites on the island" (Métraux 1940:331).

In addition to the sacred precinct, Mata Ngarau, which features the highest concentration of petroglyphs on the island (Lee 1992:137-151), early visitors mentioned doorposts "...covered with hieroglyphics and rudely carved figures" (Thomson 1891:480) and sculptured stones embedded into house walls (Geiseler 1883:15, in Ayres & Ayres 1995:37; Routledge 1920:434, 440). The interiors of the houses also were decorated with paintings (Palmer 1870:176, Geiseler, 1883 in Ayres 1995:38-44; Thomson 1891:480; Routledge 1920:432-445; Englert 1948:182-188; and Ferdon 1961:236-240).

Various authors used different house numbering conventions in their surveys of the 'Orongo complex; this, as well as the lack of any numbering in some of the earliest accounts, led to a situation where many of 'Orongo paintings lack attribution to any specific house. Moreover, some the early documentation contains duplications and uncertainties, further complicating a distribution analysis. This paper is dedicated to a partial solution of the problem as we attempt to consolidate 'Orongo surveys (Geiseler 1883; Routledge 1920; Englert 1948; Ferdon 1961; Mulloy 1997), and account for various museum artefacts that originally came from the Birdman village.

## PAINTED SLABS IN 'ORONGO HOUSES

According to Ferdon (1961:232), "...once the floor plan had been settled upon ... the room was outlined by ... unshaped vertical slabs. Since those which would be opposite the door opening apparently had special significance, they were customarily larger.... The preferred arrangement seems to have

been a pair of large slabs, *eleven* houses having this pattern, while *seven* houses had only a single large slab in this position. *Two* houses, R-36 and 38, had three and four, respectively, in a balanced position opposite the entryway. Although such an arrangement appears to have been desirable ... ten houses did not have this characteristic, while four others, although having one or more large slabs along the black wall, did not have them located directly opposite the doorway. As will be noted later, many of these special panels were decorated".

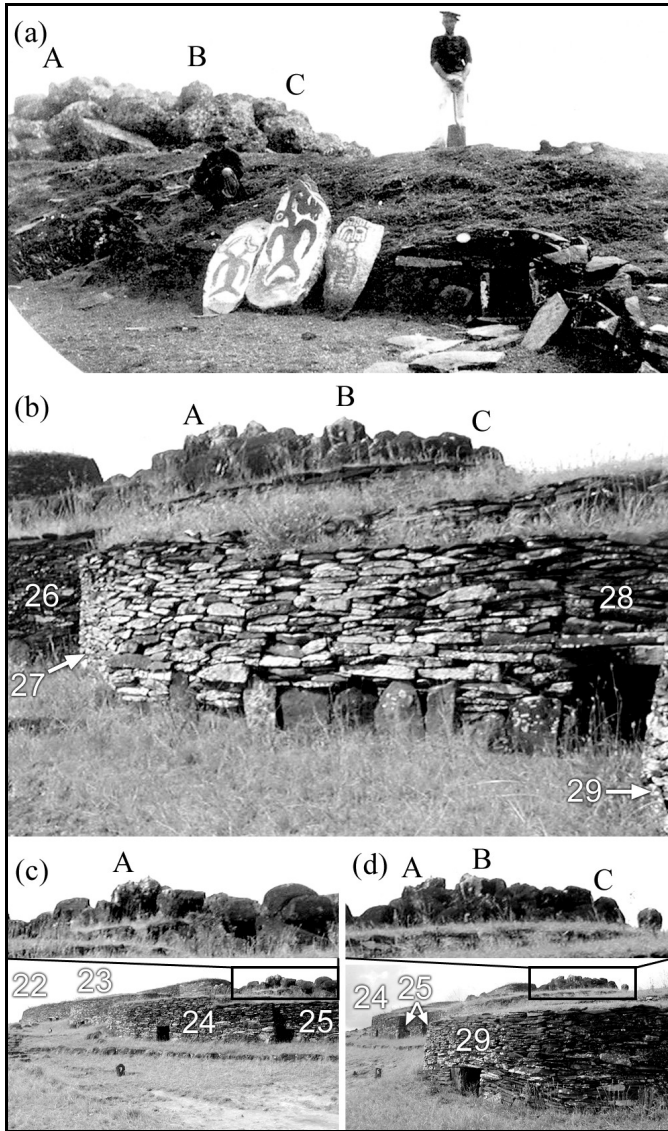
It is important to note that, at the time of Ferdon's survey, several houses had already been demolished. These included the house that contained the statue Hoa Haka Nana I'a, as well as houses with painted panels and carved rocks, thus decreasing the number of dwellings that had the panels-opposite-doorway arrangement. In some cases, the geometry of the room precluded the aforementioned configuration, as seen in houses #9 (upper row) and #40-44 (Mata Ngarau) which have very small or narrow elongated rooms.

Moreover, house orientation may have been important. Routledge (1920:443) noted, at house #27, "door at west end, not in center ... one slab (not opposite door but near it on north side, shortness of passage allowing light) [was] inscribed with design". Under such circumstances, the existence of nineteen houses with a preferred position of large panels opposite the doorways strongly suggests that, at least in a certain (most probably, the latest) period of construction at 'Orongo, painted adornments were an integral part of the architecture.

The paintings on house slabs were made with red, white, and black pigments of either a mineral (pulverized weathered tuff) or organic nature (charred leaves); shark liver oil might have been added as a pigment-binding agent (Lee 1992:186). Red was the preferred color, sacred in Polynesian art as the color of life; white contours or white background were added to enhance the visual contrast of the image (*ibid.*:187).

The earliest photographs of the 'Orongo slabs were taken by William E. Safford, who visited Easter Island with William J. Thomson on the USS *Mohican* in 1886. To bring the slabs to daylight, "Houses marked 1, 5, and 6 on Lieutenant Symond's chart were demolished at the expense of great labor and the frescoed slabs obtained" (Thomson 1891:480). The chart of 'Orongo (*ibid.*: fig. 6) shows only numbers 2-4 for the north-east houses; according to Thomson, "... the houses were numbered from 1 to 49, inclusive, commencing at the inshore extremity" (*ibid.*: 479). In this numbering system, one might expect that dwellings #1, #5, and #6 should be located at the

beginning of the upper house row. Following this reasoning, Routledge (1920:432, Footnote 1) suggested that houses “Nos. 2 and 3 are presumably those wrecked by the American Expedition in 1886, but it is not possible to make the plan of Orongo made by the *Mohican* coincide entirely with our own”.



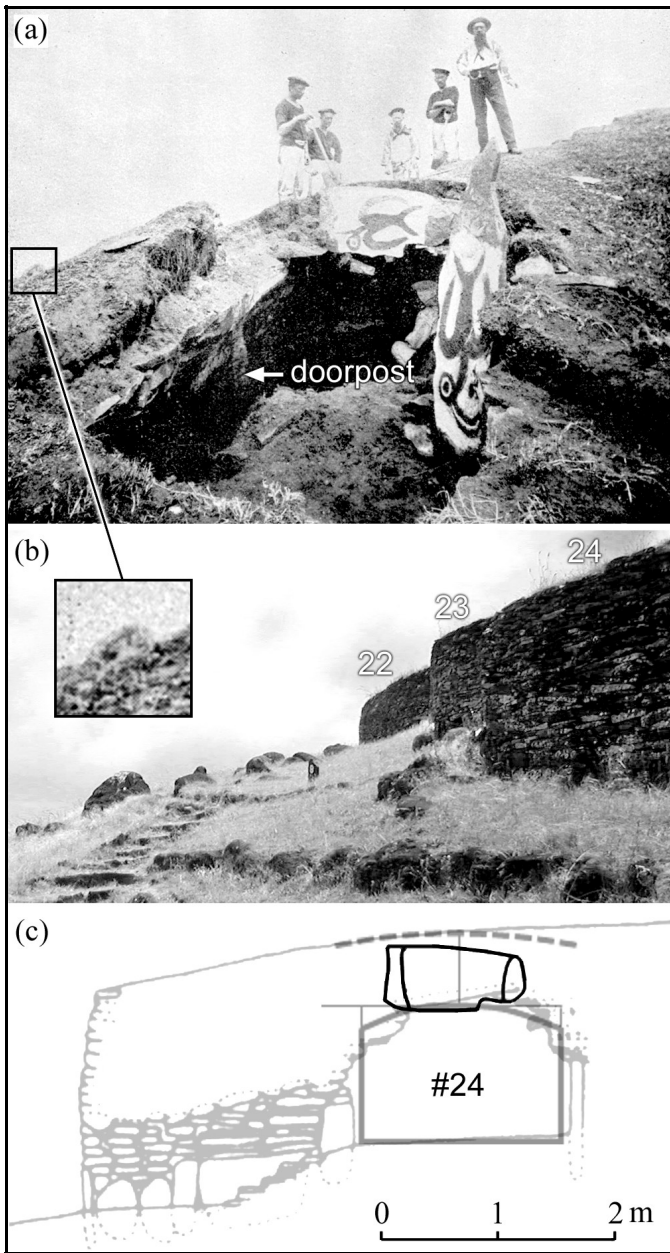
**Figure 1.** House #28: a) with three slabs excavated by Thomson's expedition (photo by W. Safford, 1886; from Van Tilburg 1994: fig. 37); b) restored house #28; note the same alignment of background rock formations A, B, C. The alignment disappears if the beholder stands in front of c) house #25 and d) house #29 (photos by P. Horley, 2002).

At the same time, dwelling #28, belonging to a distinctly different part of the village — the lower house row — was identified by William Mulloy (1997:83) as “undoubtedly one of the houses demolished by Commander B.F. Day, USN, to obtain some of the painted slabs ... (Thomson, 1889 [*sic*], Pls.

19, 23). Remaining evidence indicated that the slabs must have been taken from the ceiling rather than the walls”. Routledge reports that house #28 had “most of roof and portion of north wall gone ... Decorations: none” (1920:443). An analysis of Safford's photographs confirms the identification of house #28 as a source of the painted slabs (Figure 1); however, it is not the house shown in Thomson's Plate 19, which will be discussed later. As one can see from the photo (Figure 1a), the demolished dwelling features a low façade, the rounded wall of the neighboring house to the right, and an oddly-shaped rock formation in the background. The latter view can be replicated only if the spectator stands in front of House #28 (Figure 1b). If one moves to the entrances of the neighboring houses #25 or #29, which are just several meters away, the appearance of the background rocks changes completely (Figure 1c, d). This suggested identification can be confirmed by the presence of a rounded wall on the right side of Safford's picture (Figure 1a), which corresponds to the neighboring house #29 (Figure 1b). The slabs in the photograph fit each other quite well, which may mean that their arrangement reproduces that inside of the house. The rightmost ‘ao design (a ceremonial dance paddle and insignia of power, erroneously shown without its “headdress” in Thomson's Plate 23), was certainly depicted on a vertical panel; the upper boundary of the stone is fully painted, while its once-buried bottom part is free of pigment. The two-headed bird with a symmetrical unpainted top and with bottom “margins” could be a ceiling slab according to Mulloy's suggestion (1997:83).

Another photograph by Safford (Thomson's Plate 19) shows an unroofed building and a group of men extracting two painted slabs (Figure 2a); this view can be tentatively identified as House #24. The supporting evidence includes the roofs of the neighboring houses that are gently sloping to the right and a cone-shaped rock in left-hand side of the photo, which fits the boulder located in front of House #23 (Figure 2b). This identification is supported by Routledge's description of the condition of the house (1920:442) as “...the two ends are in fair preservation; the middle portion of the north wall [*i.e.*, where the painted slabs were] and roof have fallen”. According to Mulloy (1997:84), “... on the north-western portion ... most of the foundation slabs of the rear interior wall were tipped inward, though the vertical part of the front interior wall including the interior of the entrance passage remained in good condition”. This agrees with Safford's photograph, as well as the presence of a doorpost at the right side of the interior end of a doorway for House #24 (*ibid.*:169).

Furthermore, “...on the northeast side [of the house] there was no exterior wall, the steeply ascending outcropping making it unnecessary” (Mulloy 1997:84); this explains why the people in the center of the picture look small — they were standing on the slope in the distance but not on the roof of the house. Judging from Mulloy's maps (1997:169, section PP'), the wall was restored to a height of about 1 meter. The cross-section of House #24 (*ibid.*: section UU') agrees with the interior dimensions as estimated from Safford's photograph using the *manutara* slab (119×57 cm in size, Maiani and Quer



**Figure 2.** House #24: a) with two slabs extracted by the Mohican expedition (photo by W. Safford, 1886; from Thomson 1891: pl. 19); b) restored houses with characteristic rock (photo by P. Horley, 2002); c) cross-section of dwelling #24 (Mulloy 1997:169) and a tentative profile of excavated house estimated from Safford's photo.

1996:224) as a scale unit (Figure 2c).

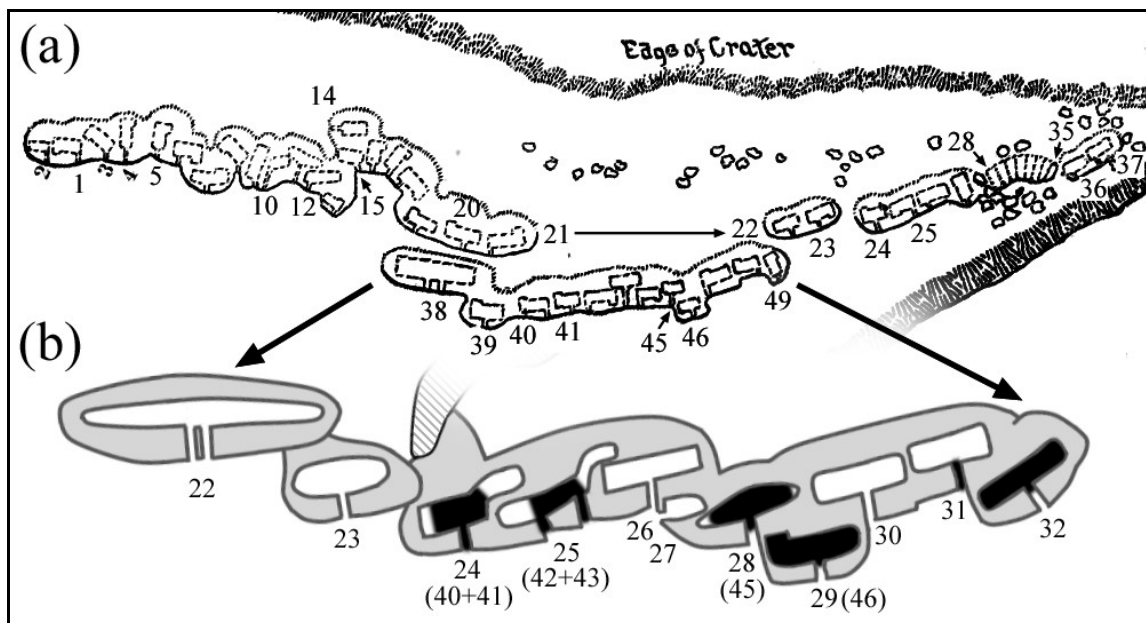
If the excavated houses belong to the lower row, why did Thomson mention them as #1, 5, and 6 (1891:480)? There is a reasonable way to assign house numbers for Lt. Symond's chart so that the demolished buildings can be related to these numbers (Figure 3a). The two houses at the beginning of the

upper row seem to have their numbers switched; this discrepancy may stem from a possible "merging" of an isolated two-house cluster to the upper line of dwellings (see Figure 12, buildings #1 and #2, left unrestored by Mulloy). This suggestion leads to a proper depiction of Houses #6, #8 and #11 as "sunken" more deeply towards Rano Kau's crater relative to the neighboring dwellings. Thomson's remark about the numbering "commencing at the inshore extremity" does not specify the order of the major house clusters. Both Routledge and Ferdon numbered the houses starting from two (currently) non-restored buildings, following through the upper row, lower row, and continuing to Mata Ngarau. In Mulloy's system, the numbering has the same sequence, but in reverse order. Thomson might have employed another strategy, numbering all inshore houses first, so that the bottom row of dwellings was processed last (Figure 3a). Symond's map has several errors; in this particular group of buildings, two-chamber houses #24 and #25 are counted as two dwellings each, and the small House #27 is missing (Figure 3b). At the same time, "...houses marked 1, 5, and 6" have a striking correlation with the tentatively-identified demolished houses #24 and #28, implying that Thomson could have omitted their leading digit '4'. The original manuscript may have had the numbers spelled as "forty one, five and six", which, by omission of the word "forty", will result in the given list of house numbers. If correct, the two remaining slabs collected by the *Mohican* expedition likely were extracted from House #29, which agrees with Routledge's description: "...roof fallen in [so that the house] could not be entered" (1920:443).

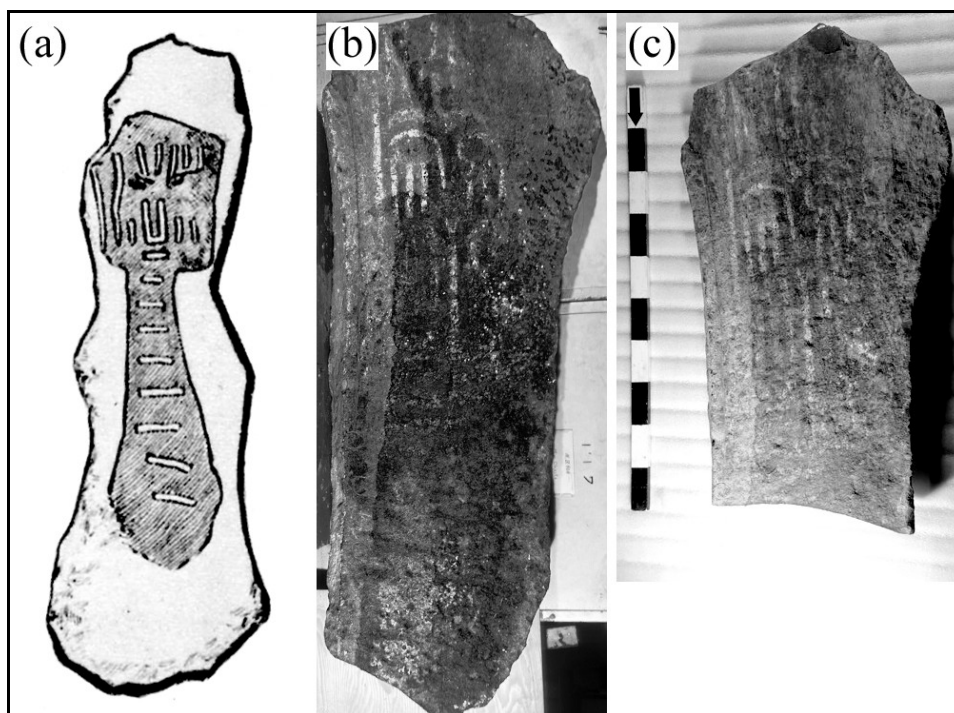
Upon the return of the USS *Mohican*, the painted panels that were collected by Commander Benjamin F. Day were deposited at the Smithsonian Institution on May 4, 1887 (SI Database, n.d.). As noted by Geiseler, "...since it was very cool inside the stone house, the paint on the figures on the stone plates was damp and could be wiped off with the touch of a finger" (Ayres & Ayres 1995:38).

Following the removal of the slabs from their humid environment, however, some pigments dried and eventually crumbled away, so that the paintings on those panels disappeared over the course of the following seventy years. During a revision of the Smithsonian collections in May 1964, all of the slabs that no longer had paintings were discarded (SI Database, n.d.). Amazingly, two painted panels adorned with *manutara* and 'ao motifs survived, which suggests that their pigment may have been mixed with a binding agent, possibly made from shark liver oil (Lee 1992:186). Those that crumbled away were probably painted with pigment mixed with water.

The panels with *manutara* and 'ao paintings, plus a house doorpost carved with *komari* motifs, were sent to Chile. They departed from the Smithsonian Institution in October of 1975 and arrived at the Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastian Englert (MAPSE) in 1979 (Esen-Baur 1983:261, Love 2008). Recent photographs of both painted panels show a good preservation of their pigments. The panel with the 'ao, however, was inadvertently damaged in transit (Figure 4). As one



**Figure 3.** Maps of 'Orongo: a) Lt. Symond's chart (from Thomson 1891: fig. 6) with suggested house numbers; b) lower row of houses (after Ferdon 1961: fig. 137) with Ferdon's numbers and Thomson's proposed numbering (in parenthesis). The black areas denote fallen-in roofs and passages according to Routledge (1920:441-444).



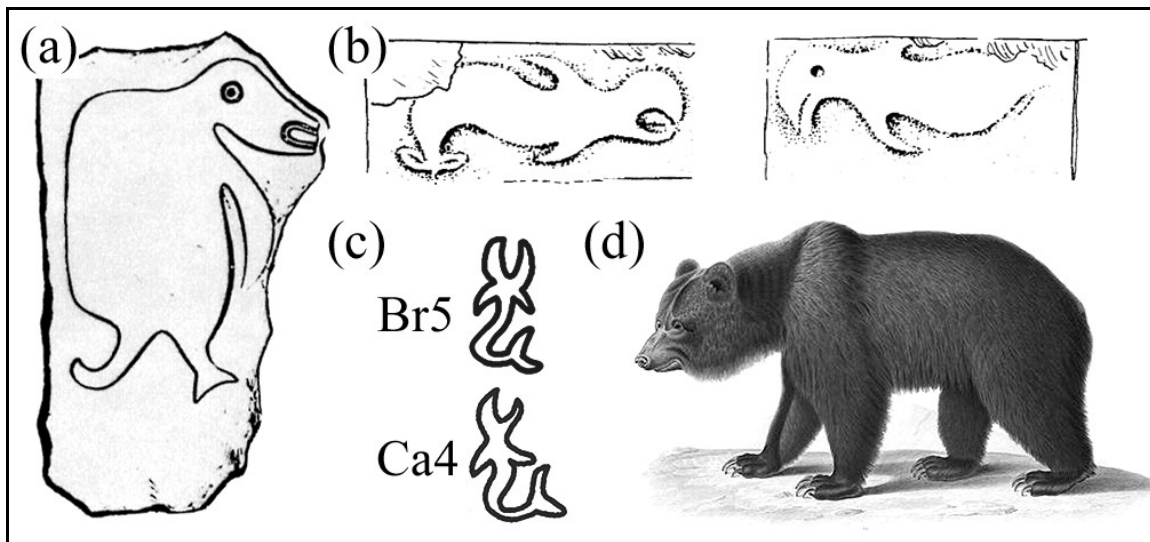
**Figure 4.** Painting of an 'ao a depicted by Anton Ayasse (Thomson 1891: pl. 23, Chauvet 1935: pl. 29.12); b) slab in the Collections of the Smithsonian, 1975 (courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution); c) modern photo of the slab (courtesy of MAPSE, photo by N. Aguayo, 2008).



can see from the picture taken at the Smithsonian prior to shipment (Figure 4b), the now-missing bottom part of the panel (Figure 4c) was devoid of any traces of paint. The 19th century appearance of this slab (Figure 4a) can be seen from the drawing by Ayasse, “a clever draftsman, [who] also accompanied the [USS *Mohican* expedition] party ... making sketches of objects of interest” (Cooke 1899:692).

Thomson’s Plate 23, with black and white tracings of the painted slabs, lacks information about the original colors and background of the paintings. Luckily, this information was preserved in the original watercolors by Ayasse, surviving in the Archives of the Smithsonian Institution (Ayasse, n.d.). Thus we know that the eyes of all the designs (if shown) were

painted in black, similar to the eye of the surviving *manutara* panel. Ayasse’s watercolors are the only known color depictions of a unique mythical animal (Figure 5a). This one-of-a-kind design has been the object of numerous debates, including suggestions that it may be a hoax (Drake 1993:50): “...was it Chandlee [the artist who made the drawings for Thomson’s report] who also created the fanciful creature (distinctly uncharacteristic in form and technique) on a slab which no one has yet been able to recover?” However, as six of eight painted panels depicted by Ayasse coincide reasonably well with photographs (Figures 1a, 2a, 4b), it seems fair to assume that the uncommon animal is somewhat faithful to the original.



**Figure 5.** Mythical creature a) depicted by Anton Ayasse (Thomson 1891: pl. 23, Chauvet 1935: pl. 29.19); b) *pakia* motifs adorning paenga stones, House of Aio (Lee 1992:97, fig. 4.90); c) *pakia* glyphs 730 from Aruku Kurenga (B) and Mamari (C) tablets, traced after Orliac & Orliac, 2008; d) brown bear (from Du Petit-Thouars 1846: pl. 4).

It was also suggested that this “unidentified animal ... is manifestly an attempt to represent the *niuhi*, whether that sea mammal is fabulous or real” (Brown 1924:109); alternatively, to be a depiction of a seal (Esen Baur 1983:150). However, seals or *pakia* (Englert 1948:482) are rare in Rapanui rock art — only 23 motifs of this kind occurs island-wide (Lee 1992:32), 17 of which are at the House of Aio (*ibid.*: 96) and 4 at ‘Anakena. The *pakia* design is conventionalized, usually showing two fins at each side of the body and a fish-like tail. It is predominantly depicted in a horizontal position with a tail curved down (Figure 5b). This motif also appears as sign 730 in the *rongorongo* script (Figure 5c). Curiously, in Jaussen’s list (Chauvet 1935: Figure 147) compiled after the readings of the inscribed tablets as performed by Easter Islander Metoro Tau’a Ure, the drawings corresponding to glyph 730 are ascribed with three different names: *taorana* (*baleine*, whale), *mangō* (*requin*, shark), and *pakia* translated as *cachalot* — a sperm whale. This unusual interpretation offers a plausible

explanation of a large open mouth, which does not resemble the mouth of a seal.

In any case, the animal depicted in the slab is different from the *pakia* designs in the rock art and the script. Judging from the vacant bottom part of the slab, the slab and the animal were intended to be oriented vertically. The painting shows a square-shape humpback body, long upper arm/fin and two bottom limbs. The mouth is comparatively small — far smaller than that of a *pakia* — but was clearly painted in red and outlined with a pronounced line of teeth (Ayasse, n.d.). In view of these differences, we suggest another interpretation of this painting, one connected with the historical visit of Abel Aubert Du Petit-Thouars, who called at Easter Island in 1838 onboard the frigate *Venus*. His account contains a peculiar detail: “...our pet bear Kamtschatka ... appeared suddenly in front of one of them [Easter Islanders visiting the ship] who, without being alarmed and without seeming frightened, seized a piece of plank ... and seemed prepared against an attack.

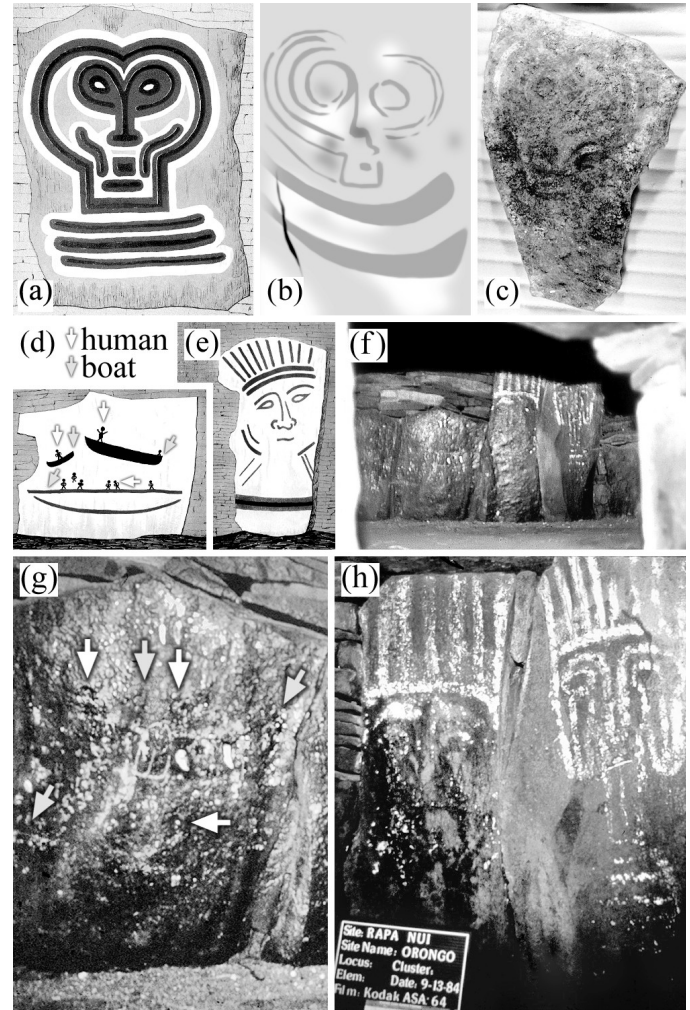
This situation, which indicated great bravery, nevertheless was not a test as this savage had never seen a bear and he took Kamtschatka to be a strange species of a dog” (Richards 2008:72). This passage implies that the bear was seen by several persons, and that it was not a cub, as the actions of the islander were considered brave. Even a medium-sized bear can present a formidable appearance when it rises on its hind legs.

For the islanders, who rarely had seen mammals other than the Polynesian rat before the settlement of the missionaries who arrived with goats, sheep, and pigs (Métraux 1940:39), a bear would have made a strong impression. It is tempting to speculate that the unusual painting at ‘Orongo can be related to that encounter, for the figure contains all the characteristic traits of a bear (Figure 5d): a massive body with a humpback spine, elongated face with red-tongue mouth and white teeth, and small eyes outlined in red. The front legs are hanging down — as they would for the bear standing on its hind legs. The sole of the foot is flat, and stylized into a fin-like shape; another lower limb can be either a hind leg or an exaggerated tail. If correct, this painting of a mythical animal can be dated to the 1840’s, when Birdman competitions were still active.

Many important details about ‘Orongo were recorded by Captain-Lieutenant Geiseler during September 19-23, 1882 (Ayres & Ayres 1995:9), with Paymaster Weisser performing ethnographic research and preparing figures for the expedition report (*ibid.*:7). Weisser’s drawings allow the exact identification of a three-masted ship (Geiseler 1883:Pl. 8, Ayres & Ayres 1995: Figure 12) with that documented by Ferdon in House #5 (1961: Figure 66c); in Weisser’s version, the ship has elaborate deck details and extra canvas on the middle mast. The big-eyed face of Oréo-Oréo from Geiseler’s report (Figure 6a) was also documented by Lavachery (Figure 6b) in House #35 (Esen-Baur 1983:99). During the restoration of ‘Orongo, William Mulloy moved this slab to the collections of MAPSE (Figure 6c).

The panels with a “...head of the deity ... [and the] ... boats with people at sea” (Ayres & Ayres 1995:38) were never — to the best of our knowledge — described after the *Hyäne* expedition (Figure 6d, e). Using computer-enhanced modern pictures, we confirm the existence of both slabs in House #26, near a well-preserved ‘ao painting (Figure 6f). The depiction of the boats was covered with black pigment, so that Routledge characterized it as “... one design in black, possibly a ship” (1920:443).

As is evident from Figure 6g, contours (and especially pointed ends) of the boats are clearly discernible as faint incisions in the panel, which may have simplified renewal of the painting. When the pigment wears off due to action of the elements (or being inadvertently smudged by the inhabitants of the house), the artist could easily re-trace the motif following the contours. Reflected light reveals the incised circles located in the places fitting the human heads in Weisser’s drawing (Figure 6d). The existence of pre-incised contours associated with the paintings and, as revealed with modern photographic techniques and computer image enhancement, can be useful in a search of other obliterated designs.



**Figure 6.** Historical depictions helping to reconstruct ‘Orongo paintings: a) Oréo-Oréo face seen by Weisser (Geiseler 1883: pl. 16); b) the same design documented by Lavachery in situ in house #35 (after Lavachery 1939: fig. 316); c) original painting (courtesy of MAPSE, photo by N. Aguayo, 2008); d) and e) paintings documented by Weisser (Geiseler 1883: pls. 13, 12); f) painted slabs in house #26 (photo by G. Lee, 1984); g) a computer-enhanced ship painting with faint incisions corresponding to Weisser’s drawing (photo by K. Sanger, 1984); h) face painting (left) with clearly visible eyes, nose, and jaw contours (photo by F. & A. Bock, 1984).

It is curious that the slab with the boats has a smooth left side and features an indentation at its right side (Figure 6f); Weisser’s drawing shows the same edges switched (Figure 6d) as if the image were in mirror-reflected form. A comparatively large *komari*, incised in the center of the panel, is absent in Weisser’s drawing, but it appears in Routledge’s watercolor (1920:Pl. 4.I). The distinct changes on a single painted panel in about a 30-year period make it tempting to speculate that the slabs at ‘Orongo might have been dynamic. That is, favored paintings may have been renewed, while non-favored designs were removed or painted over; or, the incision of

*komari* could be also interpreted as an additional act aimed to absorb (or destroy) the *mana* of the underlying motif (Lee 1992:193).

Geiseler's "head of the deity" panel was also (deliberately?) erased, leaving only its feather headdress visible — as noted by Routledge. Recent pictures taken with a flash and subjected to computer image enhancement reveal clear traces of eyes, nose, jaw outline (Figure 6h), and even a faint concave contour at the bottom of the panel (Figure 6f). It is important to emphasize that, in this particular case, Weisser's drawing shows a negative image (Figure 6e), *i.e.*, red contours correspond to white outlines and white background represent the rock surface, either unpainted or covered with red pigment, as can be seen at the headdress section (Figure 6h). Curiously, Geiseler's exploring party did not document an 'ao from the neighboring slab (Figure 6f); perhaps they omitted it because a similar 'ao was already drawn in House #5 (Geiseler 1883:Pl. 7, Ayres & Ayres 1995: fig. 11).

Another possible example of multi-stage painting can be found in the design of a ship that once adorned House #8, documented by Routledge (Figure 12C4). The main mast of the ship has a curious bifurcation in the bottom part; which is painted in the manner similar to the feet of the sailor standing on the top of the mast. Perhaps the bottom part of the mast originally represented a large human figure with shoulders located at the level of the topgallant yard, as illustrated in Routledge's watercolor.

The facing Birdmen or *manupiri* panel (Figure 7a) is one of the most elaborate paintings. Currently it is in the exceptional collection of painted panels at the MAPSE (Figure 7f). Geiseler measured this panel *in situ* as 82 cm wide and 95 cm high (Ayres & Ayres 1995:43); recent measurements of the panel report its size as 83 cm wide 125 cm high (Maiani and Quer 1996:224). The same panel was documented in 1868 by Lt. Matthew J. Harrison (Figure 7c) together with several *komari* designs. Surprisingly, Harrison's watercolor bears the caption "Capūna Pau". However, the match of watercolor details (outlines of the slab, position of a ground line, half-open Birdmen beaks) with modern photos of the *manupiri* panel, together with the faint inscription "Te Rano Kau" below the *komari* motifs, strongly suggests that the watercolor was made at 'Orongo. Thus, the reference to the Puna Pau quarry seems to be irrelevant to the subject of the picture and, most probably, it was added to the watercolor later.

Two facing Birdmen also appear in the drawings of Father Hyppolite Roussel (Figure 7d), preserved in the manuscript by Bishop Tepano Jaussen (Orliac & Orliac 2008:73, Figure 41). It was thought that these designs represented "petroglyphs found by Roussel in a cave" (Chauvet 1935: fig. 68) or at Mata Ngarau (Drake 1992:59, Figure 15a). While *manupiri* designs are frequent at the sacred precinct of 'Orongo, two-headed birds are quite rare; they feature bent-down necks and long beaks (Lee 1992:71, Locus #16; 73, Locus #31), thus being distinctly different from the bird pictured by Roussel. The design identified as a "trident" is actually an 'ao, which occurs in paintings (*ibid.*:101) but is very rare in petroglyphs; only two carvings of 'ao were recorded inside 'Orongo houses

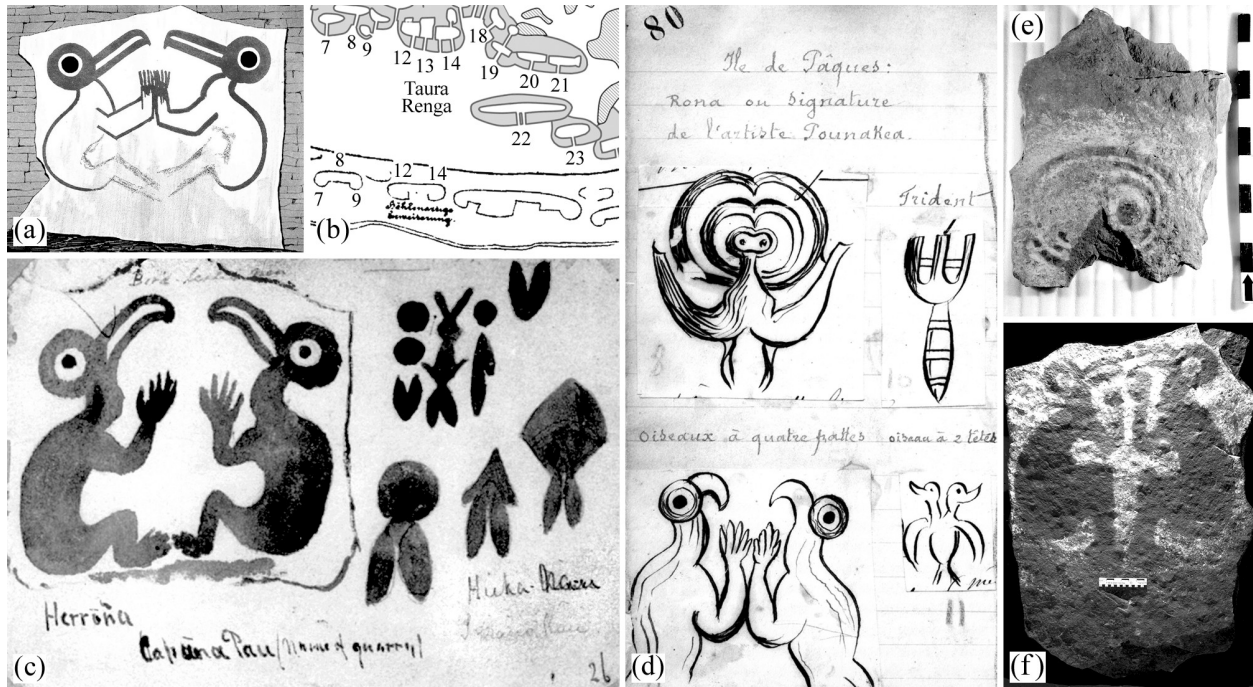
(Koll 1991:62). Horizontal stripes in the lower part of the 'ao depicted by Roussel are also characteristic of paintings (Horley & Lee 2008:114). The photographic documentation of a two-headed *manutara* and an 'ao among the slabs excavated from a single house (Figure 1a), presents evidence that supports the assumption that Roussel sketched those painted slabs rather than the petroglyphs. Developing this hypothesis, it is possible that the two other Roussel images — the Makemake face and the *manupiri* design, both preserved in the collections at the MAPSE, Figures. 7e, f — might have also decorated a single room.

Before proceeding with a tentative identification of the house from which they may have come from, in all three independent drawings by Roussel, Harrison, and Weisser (Figure 7d, c, a), the hands of the Birdmen from the *manupiri* panel clearly show individual fingers. However, in the modern photo (Figure 7f) their hands are rounded, more resembling closed fists. This suggests modification or renewal after Geiseler's visit in 1882.

The slab with a Makemake mask features a characteristic triangular "clef" below the eyes (Figure 7e); this very same shape appears in Roussel's drawing (Figure 7d), suggesting that the slab was possibly damaged in the second half of 19th century. In this case, the lower part of the drawing may be interpreted as two adjacent panels set as a "foundation" for the painting. Surprisingly, neither *manupiri* nor Makemake panels were mentioned by Routledge, Englert, or Ferdon, despite the fact that, even now, both panels are in a good state of preservation. The *manupiri* slab appears in Heyerdahl's 1989 book with a following caption: "1986 ... painting of a bird-man ... from one of the houses at Orongo. The painting was undergoing conservation treatment by experts in Santiago, Chile, pending transfer to the museum of Easter Island" (1989:148). The cited year 1986 is perplexing, as the panel already was at MAPSE in the early 1980s (*e.g.*, 1982 photo by M. Oliver / W. Hyder; Lee 1992: Pl. 25; Esen-Baur 1983:263). However, the documentation of the *manupiri* panel at Santiago suggests that it was once removed from the island and returned to MAPSE in (or before) 1980s, explaining why these Birdmen were not mentioned in any post-1882 surveys of 'Orongo.

Geiseler's account supplies the following general description concerning the location of the *manupiri* panel: "... in a stone house we found paintings on stone plates ... one represents a roughly outlined ship and the other shows the god of the sea bird eggs" (Ayres & Ayres 1995:41). The figure caption for the painting (Geiseler 1883:Pl. 15, Ayres & Ayres 1995:Figure 19) reads: "Earth color painting representing the god Makemake..." (*ibid.*: 43). The confusion of *tangata manu* with Makemake can be easily explained if the Makemake painting were also in the same room, as one might infer from Roussel's drawing.

It is important that the house with the *manupiri* panel is mentioned after the largest building in the village, House #22: "16 m long, 2.5 m wide at the middle ... 1.15 m high" (Ayres & Ayres 1995:41, also note 66, p.182) and the neighboring cluster of houses #16-18 forming a "formal court in the



**Figure 7.** *Manupiri* panel: a) Weisser's drawing (from Geiseler 1883: pl.15); b) comparison of modern and Weisser's (Geiseler 1883: pl.20) maps of Taura Renga surroundings; c) *manupiri* and *komari* drawn by Lt. Matthew J. Harrison in 1868 (from Van Tilburg 2006: fig. 45) with captions "Bird-headed men [above Birdmen], Herrōña, Huka Mari, Terano Kau [very faint letters just below], Capūna Pau (name of quarry)"; d) drawing of Father Hippolyte Roussel (courtesy of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, SS. CC.) with captions "Easter Island: rona or signature of the artist Pounakea, trident, bird with four legs, bird with two heads"; e) MAPSE panel with Makemake mask (courtesy of MAPSE, photo by N. Aguayo, 2008); f) MAPSE panel with *manupiri* (photo by M. Oliver / W. Hyder, 1982).

approximate center of all the stone houses" (*ibid.*:41, also note 67, p. 182), but directly before the room with Oréo-Oréo painting identified as House #35 (Esen-Baur 1983:99). This place, in the narrative, fits the location of the previously discussed painted panels from House #26 (Figure 6d-h). However, the later have the following location (Ayres & Ayres 1995:38, 41): "A few steps away ... lies the entrance of a 2-m-wide, 2.50-m-high, and 3-m-deep cavity formed by stone plates which is thickly overgrown with ferns. To the right of here we entered a collapsed dwelling by breaking out one of the big plates which formed a sidewall; in this dwelling we found two figures painted on stone plates ... next to each other in the middle of the back wall ... The larger of these plates shows the head of a deity, the other boats with people at sea. The dwelling to the left of the cave was so run down that the idea of penetrating it had to be given up". The description of the cavity refers to the central room of Taura Renga (Ayres & Ayres 1995:182, note 65), which was taken down by *Topaze* expedition in order to extract Hoa Haka Nana I'a. Geiseler's remark about breaking a side slab for entering the building points to House #12 (Figure 7b); "to the right of there" means that the comment was written for the spectator standing inside the ruined dwelling #13 and looking towards the ocean. At the time of *Mana* expedition, House #12 was devoid of decorations (Routledge 1920:437). Englert confirms that the

house has its "side part open and broken" (1948:184).

It may be that the descriptions of the houses and corresponding illustrations were inadvertently swapped in Geiseler's report. In this case, the *manupiri* panel (a unique depiction of this motif in paint in the whole of 'Orongo village) would have been from Taura Renga (Houses #12-14), associated with Hoa Haka Nana I'a which also has a carved *manupiri* motif on its back, probably painted in the similar way (Horley & Lee 2008:114, and Figure 5).

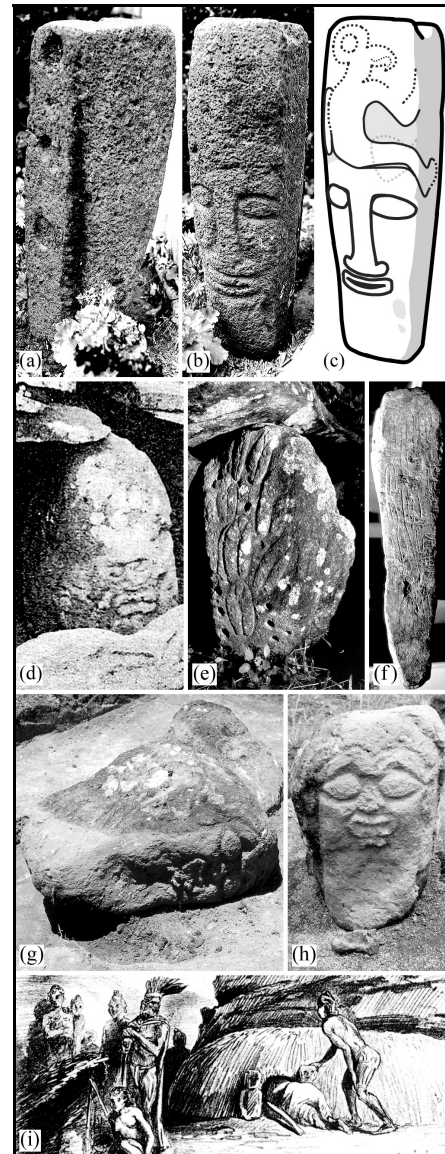
The possible presence of a Makemake painting in the same house would agree with the pronounced importance of Taura Renga in the ceremonial life of 'Orongo, which included childrens' initiation ceremonies, *poki manu* (Routledge 1919:267, Englert 1948:184). This tentative location may explain the damage to the slab below the eyes of the painting (Figure 7e) as being inflicted during the excavations by the *Topaze* expedition, so that the panel should be set leaning against the wall, using a couple of slabs to fix it in place, which would fit well with Roussel's drawing. The absence of any decorations in House #12 in the early 20th century (Routledge 1920: 437) can be considered as a supporting evidence that sometime between 1882-1914 these paintings (or at least the *manupiri* panel) were carried away from 'Orongo or even from Easter Island.

## CARVED DOORPOSTS AND EMBEDDED STONES

Almost half a century after the removal of Hoa Haka Nana I'a from 'Orongo, Katherine Routledge (1920: 438) observed several decorated artefacts in close proximity to the demolished house: "...near the line of stones [in front of Taura Renga], but on the crater side, were lying two large stones wrought as foundations for a thatched house, which have been presumed to be door-posts of No. 11 [House #13] ...on one of these a face have [sic] been carved". A picture of this doorpost appears in Routledge's publications (1919: Fig. 107, 1920: Pl. VII.2) and, since then, its trace was lost until the re-discovery by Charles Love and Robert P. Alexander (Figure 8a, b): "a petroglyph stone, originally from Orongo, [has] been spotted at the Carnegie Museum in Washington D.C. Described as a carved doorpost, it was illustrated in Katherine Routledge's *"Mystery of Easter Island"* (1919: Fig. 109 [sic]) and since that time, seemed to have disappeared from sight" (Editors 1987:3). The history of this doorpost was recently investigated in detail by Van Tilburg (*in press*). Probably, the original *paenga*, about 80 cm long (*ibid.*), came from a large house foundation at 'Orongo, assigned Mulloy's number #M25 (Figure 12). Similar *paenga* stones were embedded in the masonry of Taura Renga and nearby Houses #14, 17, and 18 (Horley and Lee 2008: 111). Prior to the carving of the face, the *paenga* was chamfered; this may indicate its intermediate re-use in another structure, possibly an *ahu* (Love *pers comm*).

An interesting peculiarity of this doorpost is a faint depiction of a Birdman above the face (Figure 8c), which, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been described in the literature. Possibly the *tangata manu* design remained unnoticed because the doorpost was originally white-washed by Routledge to improve its photographic reproduction (Van Tilburg *in press*), thus hiding the Birdman image until the time when traces of the paint disappeared due to exposure to the elements at the Carnegie Museum. The Birdman design is executed in a very low *bas relief*; its foot extends over the lateral surface of the doorpost, suggesting that the stone was standing at the left side of the entrance. The elongated shape behind the Birdman, partially seen in Figure 8b, may depict a *komari*. Similar to a carving superposition phenomenon, frequently observed at Mata Ngarau (Lee 1992:67) and on Hoa Haka Nana I'a (Horley and Lee 2008:113), a faint "keyhole" shape superimposed over the Birdman's leg and left eyebrow of the face indicates the presence of another earlier *tangata manu* carving.

It is important to emphasize that Routledge recorded a semi-portable carved stone with a seemingly similar design in close association with Taura Renga: "adjacent to ... a line of stones [in front of the house], on the sea side, is a horizontal stone on which is carved the figure of a Birdman seated on a head or skull. [footnote] The position of this stone was altered slightly by us in order to photograph it [end footnote]" (1920: 438). The stone was still in place at the time of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition, 1955-56: "...some meters in front of R-11 there was a large boulder depicting a bird man and one of the highly stylized versions of a human face in which



**Figure 8.** Carved doorposts: a-b) Taura Renga / Carnegie doorpost, back and front side (photos by C. Love, 1985); c) schematic tracing showing faint contours of a Birdman; d) front of Mata Ngarau doorpost, locus #55 (Routledge 1920: pl. XVI.1); e) side view of the same with komari carvings (photo by W. Hyder, 1982); f) MAPSE komari doorpost (photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution); g, h) Makemake boulder discovered at Complex A, locus #104 — as excavated and re-erected (photo courtesy of the Kon-Tiki Museum); i) drawing of Pierre Loti showing *hare paenga* with carved doorposts (from Heyerdahl 1961: fig.11).

only the large circular eyes were pictured” (Ferdon 1961: 240). Taking into account the numerous carved stones embedded into the masonry of the houses (which will be further discussed in detail), it is tempting to speculate that a Birdman sitting on top of Makemake face, appearing on a doorpost and a stone that was possibly associated with Taura Renga, may have served as an “emblem” of this particular house.

A carved doorpost, approximately 60cm tall (measurement of exposed part), is located between Houses #43 and #44 at Mata Ngarau. It features a face carved on its front side (Figure 8d), *bas relief komari* on a side belonging to House #43 (Figure 8e) and a *manupiri* motif on the side of house #44 (Lee 1992:51, fig. 4.10). Both doorposts with faces (Figure 8b, d) were associated with the main sites of ‘Orongo – the Taura Renga house and the sacred precinct of Mata Ngarau.

Another object that may be tentatively classified as a potential doorpost is a carved stone discovered by Ferdon at Complex A (Figure 8g, h, now known as Locus #104). As one can see from the figure, the face is carved on the upper part of a boulder somewhat flattened from the sides, with the full height of about 60-70 cm, as estimated using the scale drawing (Lee 1992:57, Figure 4.20). Ferdon says: “...although we have no stratigraphic correlation with the building periods of Structure 1 [an *ahu* at Complex A], the presence of a pair of almond-shaped eyes of the Monument 1 [Locus #104] type on one of the dressed edging stones of Structure 1a indicates that this monument was created and placed in its present position during Structure 1a times” (1961:231). However, side-by-side comparison with the Taura Renga (Figure 8b) and Mata Ngarau (Figure 8d) doorposts reveals a pronounced stylistic similarity in the depiction of the eyes and *bas relief* lips with that of the face carved at Locus #104 (Figure 8h).

An interesting iconographic detail connected with the carved doorposts is the use of faces on the frontal part. Possibly this relates to the placement of images (Figure 8i) beside the entrance of a *hare paenga*; these might have been considered as house guardians (Heyerdahl 1961:77). Despite only a limited number of carved doorposts from ‘Orongo being known, it seems that *komari* designs were often carved on the sides of the posts. A doorpost excavated by the *Mohican* expedition (now in the Collections of MAPSE) features at least fifteen of these (Figure 8f). This preferred location seems curious in the light of Polynesian beliefs that consider female reproductive organs able to absorb evil influences and remove tapu (Handy 1927: 292). This attribute was used in the architecture: “Maori house lintels with female tikis carved on them neutralized the undesirable influences from those who passed under them. Thus, the house and those who entered it were protected from evil forces” (Lee 1992:194). Possibly, *komari* carved on the sides of the doorposts had a similar protective function, removing the negative influences from the persons crawling through the narrow entrance.

Another important detail concerns carved stones embedded into the masonry of the houses. Two were described by Geiseler: “Very close to the first cliff wall [at Mata Ngarau]

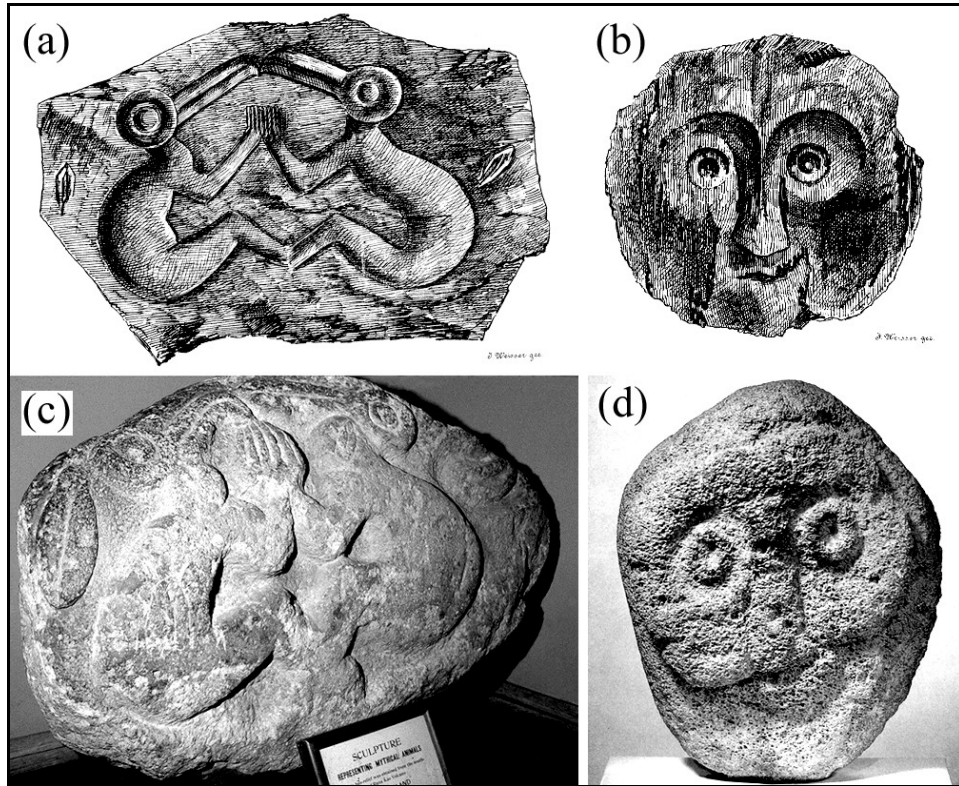
there was ... stone house which was accessible from the top, because some of its covering plates were broken. This stone house also had a side cavity and on the inside it had two larger stones incorporated into the wall; one of these stones displayed figures from the cliffs and the other the head of god” (Ayres & Ayres 1995:37). Further on: “the entrance to the last stone house ... was so entirely obstructed by rubble that we had to climb down into it from the top. This dwelling consisted of two parts, a 4.75m long and 2m wide main section and a 1.30m deep and 1.40m wide side chamber. We attempted to excavate and remove the two walled-in stone figures which we had discovered the day before. However, it soon became obvious that the carvings, which protruded approximately 2 cm, were so affected by the continual wetness that they crumbled at the touch. Under these circumstances the notion of removing them had to be abandoned; instead, pictures were drawn of them” (*ibid.*: 41, 45).

Esen-Baur (1983:54, 61) identified the house in question as #39, based on the description (Routledge 1920: 445): “Middle of the north wall and roof broken down. Exterior entrance broken”. However, Routledge reports an inner plan of the chamber that is much different from the one mentioned by Geiseler: “Rectangular main chamber 16'4" × 4'8" [4.98 m × 1.42 m]; in addition, on each side of the entrance are two large recesses, concave in form, which extend from the walls of the passage to the respective end of the house. These recesses measure at each end – that is, at their narrowest points – about 2'4" [0.71 m]. Their roofs are domed. The effect given is that the passage penetrates the house and divides its southern side into two parts” (*ibid.*) At the same time, Geiseler’s room interior fits the description of House #47, which, according to Routledge (1920: 447) was in “Condition: fair. Passage can be traced. Chamber: oval, 15'6" × 7'0" [4.72 m × 2.13 m; Geiseler: 4.75 m × 2 m]. At west end on south side is a recess with oval termination, 4'7" × 4'4" [1.40 m × 1.32 m; Geiseler: 1.40 m × 1.30 m]”.

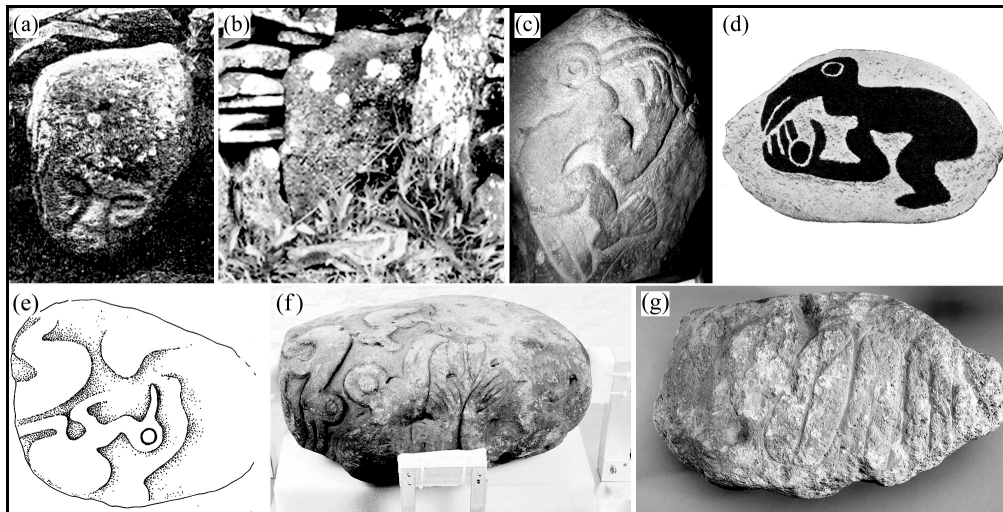
Weisser’s drawings of the embedded boulders show a stone with two facing Birdman between *komari* designs (Figure 9a). The left *komari* is oriented vertically and the other is almost horizontal, which, together with the dimensions of the artefact measured *in situ* as 64 cm × 45 cm (Ayres & Ayres 1995:46) allows a positive identification of this stone with the Peabody Museum artefact 64852 (Figure 9c). The stone was collected by Agassiz and deposited at the Museum in 1905. The modern measurements of this rock are 83 cm × 56 cm (Esen-Baur & Forment 1990: 281), which is slightly larger than Geiseler’s figures obtained from the embedded artefact. To the best of our knowledge, all the publications mentioning this *manupiri* boulder give its origin as ‘Orongo in general (Esen-Baur & Forment 1990: 281, Kjellgren 2001:45) or use more cautious formulations like “Although these [two boulders at Peabody] lack precise provenience, their carving style and subject suggest they were originally from Orongo” (Drake 1992:44). Geiseler’s account confirms this provenience, localizing it to a particular building at the Mata Ngarau house cluster.

The second carved stone features a Makemake face with





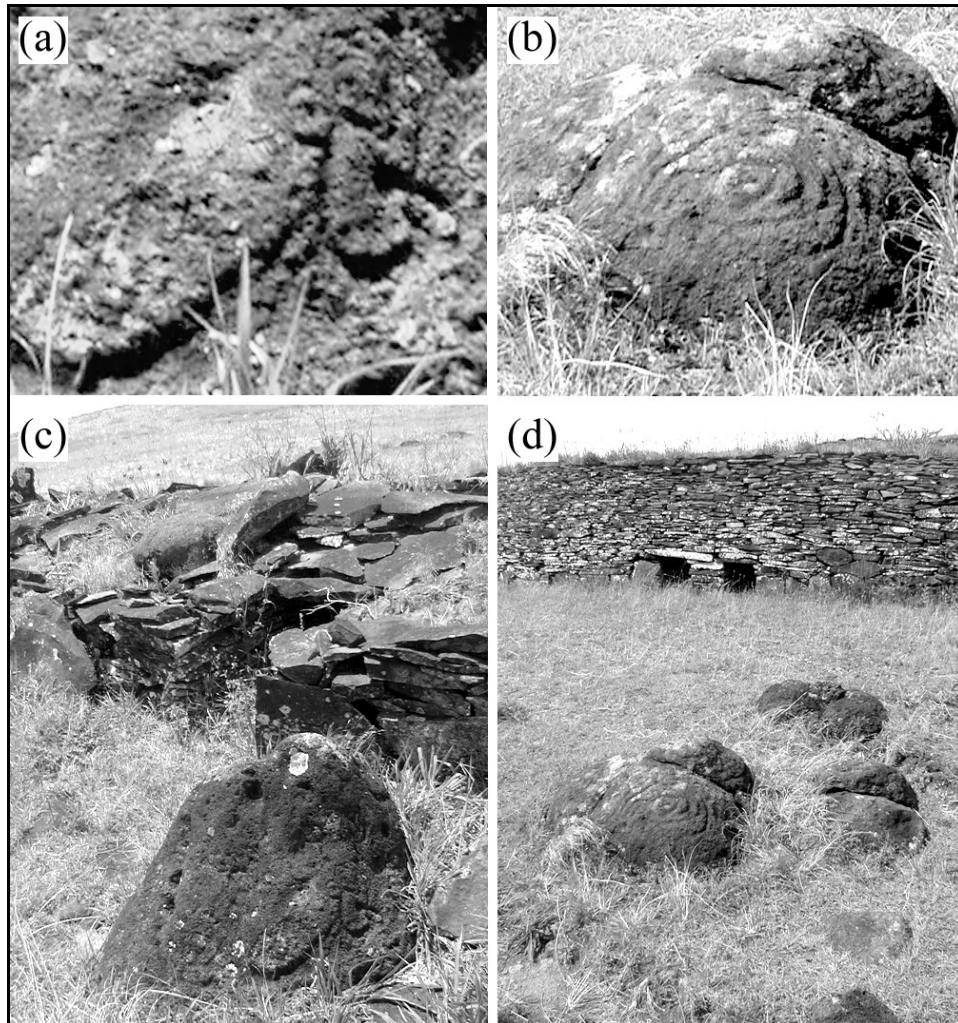
**Figure 9.** Embedded carved stones: a, b) boulders from house #47 drawn by Weisser (Geiseler 1883: pls. 18, 19 in Ayres & Ayres 1995); c) Peabody *manupiri* stone 64852 (photo by G. Lee); d) MRAH Makemake face stone ET 35.5.90 (courtesy of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire).



**Figure 10.** Embedded carved stones: a) boulder with a face decorating house #7 (from Routledge 1920: pl. VII.2), b) Birdman stone of house #18 (photo by S. McLaughlin, 2002); c) Peabody Birdman stone 64851 (photo by G. Lee); d) British Museum Birdman stone excavated by Routledge at Mata Ngarau (from Chauvet 1935: fig. 66b); e) locus #2, embedded in front of house #47 at Mata Ngarau (drawing by G. Lee, 1982); f) Smithsonian Birdman stone E128378 (courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution); g) Smithsonian *komari* stone E128379 (photo by D. Hurlbert, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution).

peculiar circular eyes and a characteristic mouth, giving it a “smiling” aspect (Figure 9b). A similar stone, 40 cm × 32 cm in size, was collected by Lavachery in [Nga] Heu cave (Esen-Baur & Forment 1990:275) and now belongs to the Collections of Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, artefact ET 35.5.90 (Figure 9d). Ana Nga Heu is famous for its Makemake petroglyphs, characterized with almond-shape eyes (Lee

1992:167, Figure 8.1). The MRAH stone, to the contrary, has distinctly round eyes; the moderate size makes it feasible to suggest that it might have been carried from ‘Orongo and hidden in Ana Nga Heu. Such long-distance relocations were recorded even for larger objects, such as the trumpet stone Pu o Hiro, transported from Hangaroa to its present location at the North-East coast (*ibid.*:198).



**Figure 11.** Petroglyphs associated with houses: a, c) small Birdman and another half-obliterated motif carved on a boulder beside non-restored house #1; b, d) Makemake mask in front of house #22 (photos by P. Horley, 2002).

Geiseler remarks that “...despite the most ardent search no other carved-in hieroglyphs or sculptures could be found, except for a roughly indicated human face and the head of a walrus” (Ayres & Ayres 1995:41). The “walrus” might have been a misidentified Makemake face superimposed with a Birdman head (as that appearing on locus #27, Lee 1992:146, fig. 5.18) or a face set above a *komari* design (superposition of these motifs was recorded in Motu Nui cave, *ibid.*: 155, fig. 5.28). The comment about a “roughly indicated human face” might have referred to a carved rock embedded in the exterior

wall of house #7 (Figure 10a; Routledge 1920:434). A walled-in boulder in house #18 (*ibid.*: 440), with a faint Birdman design, can be observed in situ (Figure 10b). Two other embedded rocks were collected by the *Mohican* expedition “from houses numbered 2, 3, and 4 on Lieutenant Symond’s chart of Orongo” (Thomson 1891:480). One is a doorpost carved with *komari* (Figure 8f); two others have dimensions similar to known walled stones and feature compositions of several Birdmen (Figure 10f) and *komari* carvings (Figure 10g). Surprisingly, the latter artefact E128379 was described

**Table 1.** House Numbering by Different Authors

<i>Geiseler 1995</i>	<i>Thomson 1891</i>	<i>Routledge 1920</i>	<i>Englert 1948</i>	<i>Ferdon 1961</i>	<i>Mulloy 1997</i>
<i>Two non-restored houses close to the cliffs</i>					
–	2	1	1	1	53
–	1	2	2	2	52
<i>Upper row of houses</i>					
	3	3	3	3	51
p.38, §4	4	3a	4	4	50
p.38, §3, 4	5	4	5	5	49
	6	5	6	6	48
	–	–	–	–	47
p.41, §7	7	7	7	7	46
	8	6	8	8	45
	9	9	9	9	44
	10	8	10	10	43
	11	12	11	11	42
p.38, §9	12	10	12	12	41
p.38, §9	--	11	13	13	40
	13	15, 14	14	14	39, 38
	14	13	–	15	37
p.41, §2	15	16	15	16	36
p.41, §2	16	17	16	17	35
p.41, §2	17	–		–	34
p.41, §2	18	18	17	18	33
	19	19, 19a	18	19	31 + 32
	20	20	20	20	29 + 30
	21	21	21	21	28
<i>Lower row of houses</i>					
p.41, §1	38	22	19	22	27
	39	23	22	23	26
–	–	–	–	–	25

<i>Geiseler 1995</i>	<i>Thomson 1891</i>	<i>Routledge 1920</i>	<i>Englert 1948</i>	<i>Ferdon 1961</i>	<i>Mulloy 1997</i>
	40+41	24	23	24	24
	42+43	25	24	25	23
p.41, §3	44	26	25	26	22
	–	27	26	27	21
	45	28, 28a	27	28	20
	46	29	28	29	19
	47	30	29	30	18
	48	31	30	31	17
	49	32	31	32	16
<i>Houses with barrow pits at their back</i>					
	22	33	32	33	15
	23	34	33	34	14
<i>Mata Ngarau and adjacent houses</i>					
p.41, §4	24	35	34	35	13
	–	36	35	36	12
	25	37	36	37	11
	26	38	37	38	10
	27	39	38	39	9
	28? + 29	40	39	40	8
	30		40	41	7
	31	41	41	42	6
	32		42	43	5
	33	42	43	44	4
	34 + 35?	43	44	45	3
	36	44	45	46	2
37, §3; 41, §8	37	45	46	47	1
<i>Excavated foundations</i>					
–	–	–	–	48, 49	–

(by Benjamin F. Day), who deposited the artefact in the Museum) as a “small stone ... on which is a rude carving representing a human head and features” (SI Database, n.d.).

Several other carved boulders may have served as embedded stones; these include a Birdman from the Peabody Museum, deposited by Agassiz (Figure 10c) together with the stone shown in Figure 9c, as well as the British Museum Birdman boulder (Figure 10d) excavated at Mata Ngarau by Routledge (1920: 451). Another possible option is Locus #2, decorated with (at least) two Birdmen. This stone now is in front of House #47, with the exposed part measuring 56cm × 42 cm (Figure 10e). It was discovered by William Mulloy “immediately outside and south of the passage entrance [of house #47] ... deliberately seated upright in the occupation surface ... in restoration it was embedded in a heavy block of concealed concrete” (1997:78).

Therefore, even though scarce early documentation allows us to trace as many as six embedded boulders, at least four others (including a possible semi-portable stone decorated with a Birdman sitting on a face or skull, seen by Routledge and Ferdon in front of Taura Renga) also might have been walled-in decorations. The popularity of embedded carved rocks can be attributed to the flexibility of their use, allowing one to carve the object from the desired material and to use it for decoration of a particular part of a stone house.

In contrast to Mata Ngarau, there are few carved designs on the natural rock outcrops associated with the houses of ‘Orongo village. The motifs depicted include anthropomorphs, *komari*, Birdmen, and Makemake masks (Lee 1992:134-136); usually, these designs are of modest artistic quality, even in comparison with the carvings on the embedded boulders. A large stone in front of House #1 (Figure 11a, c) features a “small Birdman figure and a larger design obliterated by weathering” (Routledge 1920: 431); the eroded “keyhole” shape and associated *bas relief* outline beneath it (Figure 11a) suggest that the larger carving most probably also depicted a Birdman. A Makemake face mask adorning an outcrop in front of house #22 is peculiar by its multiple outlines (Figure 11b, d).

## HOUSE-NUMBERING CONVENTIONS

The cross-referencing of the different numbering conventions for ‘Orongo houses is summarized in Table 1. The earlier house number collations did not include the complete Englert and Mulloy house list (Esen-Baur 1983:54) or they presented only Routledge, Ferdon and Mulloy’s numbering (Koll 1992:87,88). Table 1 corrects these omissions. We also identify the houses described in Geiseler’s account, based on the reported room dimensions and documented paintings. As Geiseler did not supply house numbers, it was considered more useful to mention the page numbers corresponding to his house descriptions according to the Geiseler report (Ayres & Ayres 1995:37-41).

The reconstruction of Thomson’s house numbering convention assumes that numbers #2-4 (Thomson 1891: fig. 6) are correct, which implies that two non-restored buildings #1

and #2 were joined to the upper row; the proposed numbering allows us to keep the identified demolished bottom-row houses related with Thomson’s Numbers 1, 5 and 6 (*ibid.*: 480). As was mentioned, Thomson’s map shows some of the multi-room buildings as separate rooms. The destroyed portion of the Taura Renga house was depicted as a small niche in the upper house row (Figure 3a, to the right of house #12). At the court area of Mata Ngarau, Thomson’s map displays eight rooms in place of six; in our opinion, Thomson’s #28 and #35 do not correspond to rooms, but actually are the walls embracing the houses. Because of this, we listed the latter numbers together with adjacent marginal houses #29 and #34 opening to the court area of the sacred precinct.

Mulloy’s numbering convention was not included in full in the first part of his Bulletin IV (Mulloy 1997:66-88). Therefore, Mulloy’s data, presented in Table 1, was completed with the house numbering as reported by Robert Koll (1992:88), which coincides with the numbering system employed by the expedition cartographer Carlos Corrasco (*ibid.*: footnote 1). It includes house #M34, omitted by Routledge and Ferdon (but documented by Thomson). Mulloy’s #M25 corresponds to a large *hare paenga* foundation in front of the bottom row of the houses; #M47 is assigned to a cave (Koll 1992: 88) above #M45 (*i.e.*, Ferdon’s #8).

## ANALYSIS OF ‘ORONGO VILLAGE DECORATIONS

Figure 12 presents a schematic depiction of all the ‘Orongo paintings known to the authors, together with the individual house attributions (numbers in circles), where possible. The location of paintings A8 and C3 follows the identification by Esen-Baur (1983:99, 115). The capital letters at the left side of the tracings denote the initial of the documentation source: Jaussen (c.1870? drawings of Father H. Roussel, Fig. 7d), Palmer (1868 watercolor of M.J. Harrison, Fig. 7c), Geiseler (1883 drawings by Weisser), Thomson (1886 photos by W. Safford and drawings by A. Ayasse), Routledge (1920), Lavachery (1939), Englert (1948), Ferdon (1961), Smithsonian Institution (1975), Hyder (1982), Koll (1991), and MAPSE (photos by N. Aguayo, 2008). Letters in italics means that the artefact was mentioned but not depicted. Underlined letters denote the source after which the corresponding tracing was made. The contours of the panels and image details were verified using the perspective-corrected photos from Heyerdahl 1989:213 (C2), photo by K. Sanger, 1984 (A4, C6), photo by Frank and A.J. Bock, 1986 (B9), and Bellono and Massajoli (C3). The outlines of the slab for A7 are based on Routledge’s watercolor (1919:fig. 105.2).

At the right hand side of Figure 12 we present a schematic plan of ‘Orongo village compiled after maps by Ferdon (1961 fig. 137) and Mulloy (1997:163), with tentative outlines of Mulloy’s houses #M25, #M34, and #M47. The main types of motifs appearing on painted panels, carved stones and doorposts are denoted with corresponding symbols, solid if the picture documentation is known, and open for verbally-described designs.

As seen in the figure, the majority of the paintings can be classified into “one of three categories: birds; whole or upper part of dance paddles decorated with a stylized face ... [with] the ‘weeping eye’ motif; and boats” (Ferdon 1961:236). Earlier accounts supply a much wider list of categories for painting subjects: “... like the geometric figures of the Mexicans, some birds, rapas, faces, Eronié (a curious mythic animal like a monkey with a bird’s head); M’hanus, or double-headed penguins. Symbolic figures of phallic nature (Hiki-Nāu), rude tracings of horses, sheep, and ships” (Palmer 1870:176). However, this variety is misleading. The “double-headed penguins” most certainly corresponds to a two-headed bird (Figure 12B4), explaining the name “M’hanu” = *manu*. The “animal like a monkey with a bird’s head” refers to *manupiri* (Figure 12B1). Harrison’s watercolor (Figure 7c) supplies a more recognizable form of a “mysterious” Eronié – “Herrōña” = *herona*, a figure or a design (Englert 1948:495). Unusual “Hiki Nāu” also appears in Harrison’s drawing, revealing the original spelling “Huka Mari” = *he komari*, which matches the illustrated vulvae motifs. It is difficult to arrive to a definite conclusion regarding the “rude tracings of horses [and] sheep”, but these may have included the “mythical animal”, Figure 12D1.

Finally, the “geometric figures [similar to those] of the Mexicans” might have referred to stylized human faces featuring circular eyes with parallel “teardrop” lines. It is worth noting that despite of visual similarity to the faces shown on the upper part of an ‘ao, these horizontal faces may have a different meaning, being depicted sideways even if the dimensions of the panel allowed a space for a full-sized vertical ‘ao (Figure 12A6). Additional analysis is required to clarify these details. The paintings were the most popular form of decoration for the houses, with over 30 documented artefacts known (Figure 12). Walled-in stones carved in *bas relief* appear to be the second most frequent adornment; six boulders are described historically and four more possibly were used for the same function. The carvings on the natural rock outcrops scattered around the village, outside Mata Ngarau, are surprisingly few.

It is necessary to emphasize the pronounced non-homogeneity of the designs regarding the media used (not counting for the carvings on Mata Ngarau loci). Thus, birds, ships, and ceremonial paddles (‘ao) were mostly restricted to painting; there are only two (‘ao) petroglyphs and two bird petroglyphs documented inside the houses (Koll 1991: 64). To the contrary, the Birdmen and *komari* were almost exclusively carved; they appear on the doorposts (Figure 8b, Lee 1992:51, Figure 4.10) and embedded stones (Figure 10b-f). *Komari* comprise 130 out of 173 total petroglyphs documented inside the houses (Koll 1991:61). This motif may form considerable clusters (Figure 12E2-4); in house #17 “one stone highly ornamented, painted, and with seven *komari* figures deeply cut” (Routledge 1920: 440); in house #20 “there are many *komari* petroglyphs. On one of the slabs of the interior wall there are 36 of them” (Englert 1948:185). *Komari* appear on embedded stones (Figure 9c, 10c, f, g), as well as on doorposts (Figure 8e, f). Makemake faces can be depicted in paintings

(Figure 12A8 and A9) or carvings (Figure 8b, d, h; 9d; 10a; 11d).

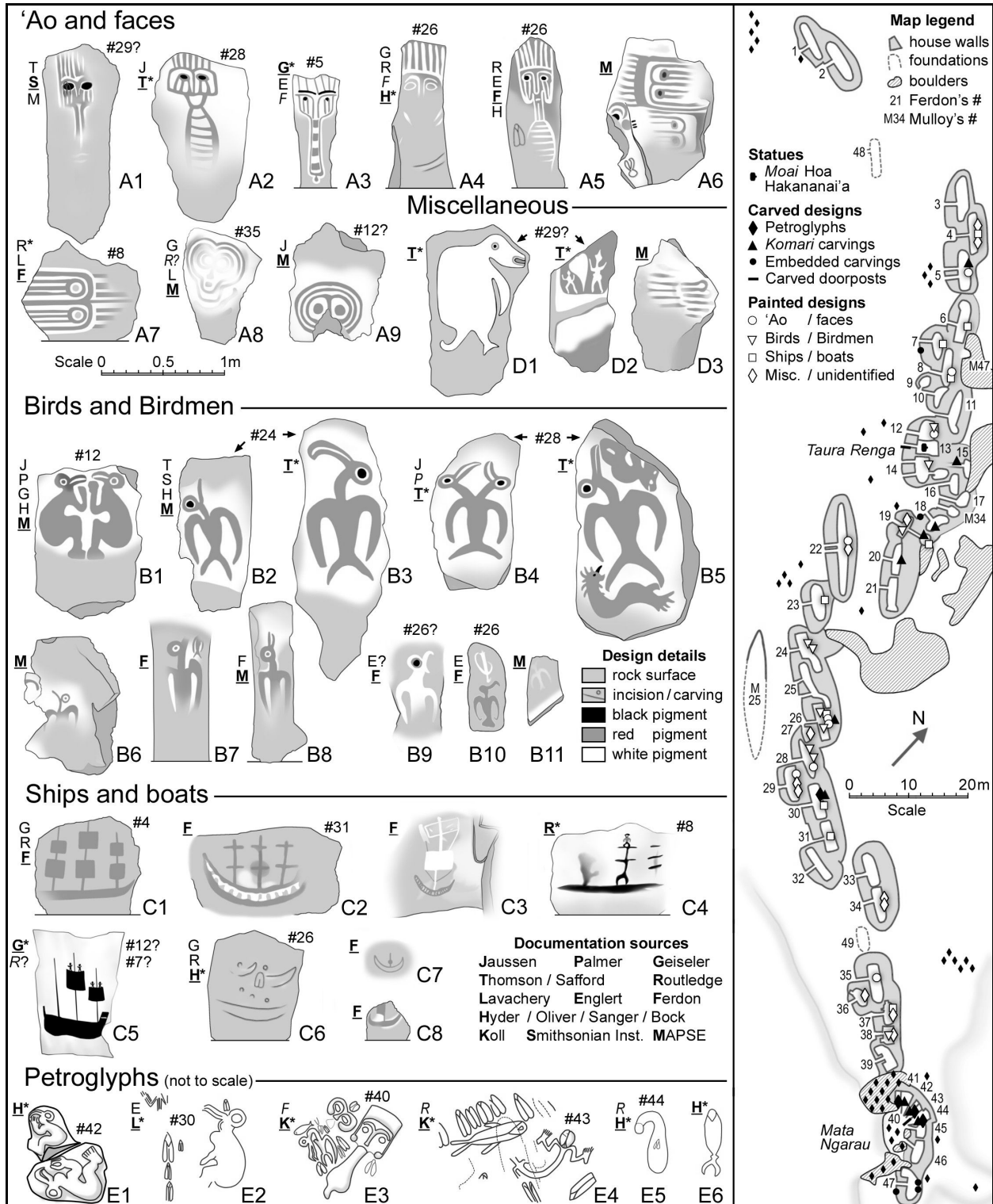
The general richness of painted and carved house decorations at ‘Orongo village, along with the highly ornamented rocks of Mata Ngarau (which might have been also painted during the ceremonies, Horley and Lee 2008:115) might be considered as an attempt to “outdo” the decorations of the royal residence at ‘Anakena, including the embellished Ahu Nau Nau and surrounding *paenga* (Lee 1988:51-59, 1992:167-173). Artistic “domination” may have been connected with the ideological shift from ancestor worship and hereditary kingship to the rule of *matato’a* warriors and their annually-elected sacred Birdman.

Another consideration is the frequent depiction of ships in ‘Orongo paintings. Eight of these are known from historical drawings / tracings; adding those mentioned in the *Mana* expedition survey (Routledge 1920), the total number of painted ships could be as high as ten, exceeding the paintings of ‘ao and Makemake faces altogether, and approaching the numbers of the known bird paintings. Such extraordinary quantity of depicted ships is unexpectedly high for the site with practically exclusive dedication to the Birdman cult and *poki manu* initiation rites (Routledge 1919:267).

The special location of ‘Orongo offers an unsurpassed outlook over a wide area of the horizon, covering significant parts of all possible approaches to Hangaroa bay, the favorite landing site of early visitors. To have a total view of the west coast, the beholder needed only to stride to the modern Mirador at Rano Kau, which could be accomplished in several minutes. In addition to a wide field of view, the high position of ‘Orongo is also beneficial for long-range observations. The distance to the visual horizon D, as seen from an altitude h can be calculated as  $D = 123.5226 \sqrt{h}$  (French 1982:798; the formula is valid for the altitudes below 1km above the sea level and takes into account the atmospheric refraction; the values of D and h are both expressed in kilometers). Thus, for a 1.73m tall person (the average stature of Easter Islander according to Shapiro 1940:28) standing at the seashore, the horizon will be about 5 km away. For an observer located at ‘Orongo village, perched on the cliffs some 300 m above the sea level (Mulloy 1997:134, Figure 6), the visibility range will more than 67 km, offering a significant advantage for early detection of any approaching vessel.

It is tempting to speculate that the numerous depictions of historic ships at ‘Orongo might be a consequence of monitoring for ships visiting the island. While similar observations might have been performed from Poike and Terevaka, the village of ‘Orongo has a better strategic location due to its proximity to the populated area of Hangaroa and the presence of permanent and durable stone houses. Upon sighting a ship, an observer located at the top of Rano Kau’s caldera could have delivered his message to the Rapa Nui community by lighting a signal fire. Communication with fire was reported by early visitors and is still used nowadays (Lee 1992:17, 23, Note 5); a resulting smoking shaft above Rano Kau could be seen from almost any place on the island, with only few exceptions of completely “shielded” areas such as Hanga Oteo.





**Figure 12.** Map of 'Orongo village after Ferdon (1961: fig. 137) and Mulloy (1997:163) with tracings of the known paintings. The description of the tracings is given in the text. The designs marked with an asterisk "\*" traced after perspective-corrected photos or free-hand drawings, hence panel scale and proportions can be considered as tentative estimations only.

A possible bit of supporting evidence for this hypothesis is suggested by 'Orongo's toponym itself, which translates as "the place of the messenger" (SERNATUR n.d.:8). This interpretation usually considers a messenger informing about the arrival of birds. However, the cries of *manutara* flocks returning to Rapa Nui "...can be heard for miles and the noise during the nesting is said to be deafening" (Routledge 1917:345). Upon their arrival, the sooty terns were "...flying over the breeding ground for a month or more without ever landing. Circling the island at night they scream constantly, then at the dawn they fly out to fish at sea. By dark they return ... they begin to light on the ground after five or six weeks" (Drake 1992:50, note 5). Therefore, all islanders would be already aware of the arrival of the birds well in advance of the beginning of the Birdman competition, so that a message about the return of the *manutara* would be mainly ceremonial in character. On the contrary, the timely detection of an approaching ship from a distance and the immediate alerting of the whole Island population might have been of extreme importance, allowing them to gather the required number of people, either for trading or defensive purposes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The consolidation of various 'Orongo surveys, early visitor documentation, and artefacts collected from the Birdman village, which now belong to various museums worldwide, made it possible to uncover the significant richness of painted and carved decorations of the houses, perhaps as an artistic "challenge" to the adornments of the *ariki mau* residence at 'Anakena. Mural paintings, usually located on panels opposite the doorway or the ceilings of the houses, often depict ceremonial paddles/insignia of power ('*ao*'), birds, and ships. The prominent number of paintings showing historical vessels is unexpected for a site with an exclusive dedication to Birdman cult activities, suggesting that the strategically beneficial position of 'Orongo might have been also used for monitoring the horizon for approaching ships.

The historical documentation of the paintings reveals that the *manupiri* panel and two paintings from House #26 were possibly modified between the *Hyäne* and the *Mana* expeditions (1882-1914). We found that some paintings might have had faint incisions along their contours, perhaps useful for the further search of obliterated or erased motifs using modern photographic and image enhancement techniques.

In addition to mural painting, the houses of the Birdman village were decorated with stones carved in *bas relief*, some of which are still *in situ*, while others are preserved in various museums. Such carvings usually include Birdmen, Makemake faces, and vulva motifs. Petroglyphs inside the houses, in the majority of the cases, depict *komari*, which can be grouped into clusters. The vulva motifs also appear on the sides of doorposts, possibly intended to absorb the evil influences from the persons entering the house, serving as protective elements similar to the faces carved on the frontal surface of the doorposts.

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## CELEBRATING SIROLIMUS

A plaque has been erected near 'Orongo on Rano Kau commemorating the discovery of Sirolimus (a/k/a Rapamycin), an immunosuppressant drug used to prevent rejection in organ transplantation; it is especially useful in kidney transplants. Sirolimus was first discovered as a product of the bacterium *Streptomyces hygroscopicus* in a soil sample taken from Easter Island during the METEI (the Canadian medical expedition) in 1964. It is marketed by Wyeth under the trade name "Rapamune". Source (including photo): *Wikipedia*:

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapamycin#cite\\_note-Vezi-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapamycin#cite_note-Vezi-0)>.

